

Learning differences and workplace literacy and numeracy

- Empowering the hidden 20%

So – just what are we talking about?

- 10% in the wider population – up to 20% in our world – have learning differences.
- Differences – not disabilities. Like left-handedness.
- Try telling Barack Obama, Bill Gates, Paul McCartney and Oprah Winfrey that they are inferior because they are left-handed.
- A genetically derived difference in the way the brain is wired.
- Most obvious external sign is difficulties with reading, writing and spelling

Some more information

- Dyslexia does not describe intellectual inferiority in any way.
- Dyslexia lasts a lifetime.
- Affects both genders equally.
- There is a number of other symptoms in addition to the challenges with text. – **short term memory** and **sequencing** challenges
- Heterogeneous condition – no two dyslexic people have the same sets of symptoms.
- Along with the challenges come a lot of positive features. (More later)

A little activity for you – how much can
you write in a minute

“We know that dyslexia robs people of time. Often we think that folk with dyslexia are lazy – but they are trying just as hard. It just takes them longer to process information. Some researchers say that it takes dyslexic folk the square of the time it takes regular folk to complete some tasks.”

Positive Dyslexia

- This is the exciting side of the dyslexia story.
- Dyslexic folk often exhibit a range of other characteristics: -
 - Creative, alternative thinkers.
 - Visual, Spatial, 3-D awareness
 - Often see patterns and trends that others do not see.
 - Often very empathetic.
 - Often talented in reading people.
 - Many entrepreneurs are dyslexic

So, what about the workplace?

- Should think of dyslexia as a significant subset of the wider workplace literacy and numeracy issue.
- In general there is little known about dyslexia in the workforce. Many myths abound.
- There are many things that workplaces and WLF providers can do to make a significant difference for employees.
- Support for dyslexic employees can benefit the employers as well as employees

So – what should we/workplaces do.

- Significant improvements can be achieved at minimal cost.
- The biggest obstacle are mindset and a lack of awareness.
- Many businesses are of the belief that: -
 - “It is set in stone”
 - “ they can work around it.”
 - “It is all very difficult”
 - “It is all very expensive.”
 - “It wont make any difference

How to make a significant difference

- Information is paramount
 - for management
 - for dyslexic staff
 - For staff who could be dyslexic
 - For supervisors who could pick up on tell-tale signs
 - For regular staff who work with dyslexic colleagues.
- Identification is valuable
 - confirmation of who is dyslexic (and who isn't) is of immense value

Making a difference - continued

- Encourage company buy-in/encourage organisation buy-in
 - There is a value proposition for a workplace to get involved.
 - There are a number of inexpensive things a company can do that make an enormous difference.
 - font changes
 - small changes to the way written material is presented
 - differences in the way instructions are given

Technology

- There is an amazing amount of technology that levels the playing field for folk with dyslexia.
- Much of it is not expensive – and getting cheaper all the time.
- There are many great apps for regular cell phones.
- New technology is coming out all the time

The biggest challenge

- Overcoming peoples mindsets
 - Dyslexic folk themselves. Many reports of “learned helplessness”.
- The best way forward is for dyslexic folk to “own their own condition” and be up front about it – but that is a big ask.
- Most dyslexic people have had a lifetime of hiding their dyslexia. To suggest that they are open about it is a big ask.

In summary.....

If there is a silver bullet – it is:

Quality information